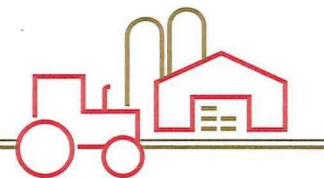




ELIJAH BEHNKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 89th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



01/12/2022

Testimony on Assembly Bill 673, Assembly Committee on Environment

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Committee on Environment,

Thank you for holding a public hearing today and allowing me to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 673 (AB 673), which requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to stock at least 100,000 brook trout in Lake Michigan annually.

One of the most popular uses of Wisconsin's natural resources is fishing. Our state boasts a wide variety of fish for anglers to catch, from bass, to musky, to pike, and so many more. AB 673 deals specifically with one popular fish, brook trout.

While much brook trout fishing happens in streams, many fisherman do so from docks and piers on the shores of Lake Michigan. However, according to the DNR, "Through loss of habitat, pollution, sea lamprey predation, and overfishing, [brook trout] disappeared from many shores of the Great Lakes".

This bill would simply require the DNR to stock at least 100,000 brook trout in Lake Michigan on an annual basis. This action would help ensure healthy population levels that could also sustain fishing seasons. The need for this program comes from the difficulty brook trout face reproducing naturally along the shores of Lake Michigan.

This is not a new initiative, as the precedent for this existed for some time in the past. From 1977 to 1999, Wisconsin was stocking hundreds of thousands of brook trout in Lake Michigan each year. With the exception of 40,000 in 2010, none have been stocked since 2003.

AB 673 would ensure that Wisconsinites and out of state visitors will always be able to enjoy fishing brook trout in our state. This bill will go a long way in protecting a cherished and longstanding tradition in Wisconsin.

Thank you again for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 673 and allowing me to testify in favor of it. I am happy to answer any questions you many have.



STATE SENATOR

Eric Wimberger

DISTRICT 30

Testimony on Assembly Bill 673

Assembly Committee on Environment

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

Chairman Kitchens and Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on Assembly Bill 673, which would require the DNR to annually stock Lake Michigan with at least 100,000 brook trout. As you know, Mr. Chairman, this bill is part of the Wisconsin Sporting Freedom Package, a group of initiatives designed to preserve and enhance Wisconsin's heritage of fishing, hunting and trapping not only today but for future generations.

This initiative to stock Lake Michigan with brook trout is right in line with the long established practice of maintaining and stocking our lakes, rivers, and streams for the enjoyment of today's anglers and the tradition of future anglers. The brook trout is a particularly popular sport fish because it stays close to the shore of Lake Michigan, making it accessible for all types of anglers. Fishing has an important economic impact on this state's economy and increasing opportunities for more anglers along the shores of Lake Michigan will not only benefit the sport but the local economies as well.

With this bill being one of many important initiatives in this sporting package, I am proud to stand up for the men and women who want to be seen as partners in economic impact, management, and easy access to some of the great resources this state has to offer. Investing in wildlife and protecting habitat is an essential part of Wisconsin's sporting heritage.

I hope you will look favorably on this Brook Trout Initiative as well all of the legislation in the Sporting Freedom Package.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our testimony this morning. I will be happy to take any questions.

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Assembly Committee on Environment

2021 Assembly Bill 673 *Stocking Brook Trout in Lake Michigan* *January 12, 2022*

Good morning Chair Kitchens and members of the Committee. My name is Todd Kalish, and I am the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Fisheries Management for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Assembly Bill 673 (AB 673).

The DNR incorporates biological, social, and economic factors into all stocking decisions by following a structured, science-based, and inclusive process for developing, implementing, and evaluating stocking initiatives. The department has a long history of collaborating with stakeholders in the development, implementation, and evaluation of management initiatives for Lake Michigan. A requirement to stock at least 100,000 brook trout in Lake Michigan has not been discussed or recommended during any recent stakeholder engagement processes, including the 2020-2022 Lake Michigan stocking planning process.

The department is currently implementing the 2020-2022 Lake Michigan stocking plan, which includes the annual stocking of 50,000 brook trout. This plan was extensively vetted with stakeholders and includes a structured process to evaluate its effectiveness. The current brook trout stocking plan is being evaluated through biological and creel surveys to assess whether the initiative is successful. Results of the evaluation will be assessed in 2022 and 2023, and a determination will be made in consultation with stakeholders to increase, decrease, or change the stocking of brook trout in the fall of 2023.

The department has a structured assessment protocol to evaluate fish stocked in the state. Fish stocking numbers, locations, genetic strains, and life stages are constantly adjusted to maximize survivability and angler catch rates. AB 673 does not allow any flexibility to adjust stocking to maximize its effectiveness. In addition, if angler catch rates of stocked brook trout are very low, we would not be able to discontinue stocking these fish in favor of other species. Stocking is one of many tools the department uses to enhance fisheries throughout the state. A directive to stock a certain number of fish only highlights one tool we have. Other management activities such as habitat protection and enhancement are just as important as stocking.

The goal of many stocking initiatives is to stop stocking once natural reproduction is restored to levels that support a sustainable population. AB 673 does not address stopping stocking even if it is no longer warranted. The department respectfully requests consideration of the existing efforts of the department and numerous stakeholders to develop, implement, and evaluate the current Lake Michigan stocking plan and suggests vetting potential changes through a collaborative stakeholder engagement process that incorporates the relevant biological, social, and economic data.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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Dale Maas, Secretary
Brett Weir, member
Terri Roehrig, member

January 12, 2022

To the Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Environment:

RE: Wisconsin Conservation Congress position on Assembly Bills AB-658 (WDNR partnering with Aquaculture Industry Report), AB-670 (DNR Habitat Work Report), AB- 673 (WDNR Brook Trout stocking in Lake Michigan)

On behalf of the over 300 delegates of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) who represent the citizens of this state, I would like to provide our position on the aforementioned bills.

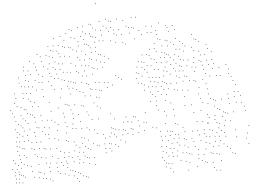
The Wisconsin Conservation Congress does not support AB-658 (SB-617) Partnering with Aquaculture Industry Report or AB-670(SB-614) related to Habitat Work Report. The WCC feels that the addition of such "reports" simply adds unnecessary bureaucracy—adding paperwork for the sake of paperwork. These do nothing for the actual natural resources of our state and directs limited WDNR funds & resources to unnecessary uses.

AB-676 (SB-612) related to WDNR Stocking Lake Trout into Lake Michigan (no appropriation). WCC opposes the passage of this bill in part because no funding source has been identified. The bill also fails to provide a true source for this stocking. Our state hatcheries are at capacity producing fry of other species. We would have to reduce production and stocking of currently produced species (like great lakes salmon) to provide additional brook trout production and stocking. We do not feel this is the best utilization of our state funds for the return on investment.

The WCC is normally heavily involved in the creation of the rules and regulations that govern and protect Wisconsin's Natural Resources as we are advisory to the WDNR and NRB and provide the Wisconsin Legislature with valuable citizen input, however in the case of these bills we were not involved at any level. The involvement of the WCC provides the sportsmen and women of Wisconsin an opportunity to provide their ideas and feedback on regulations for the use of Wisconsin's natural resources. This process that allows for the public's involvement also helps to ensure the protection of Wisconsin's natural resources now and for the future.

As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.

Thank you for your careful consideration of our input.



Respectfully,

Tony Blattler, WCC Chair